



Right Time Training: Trauma Informed Resource Parenting

Part Two: Understanding Behavior CORE TEEN CURRICULUM

In Acknowledgement

On behalf of the CORE Teen Partners, we would like to acknowledge and thank the many content experts, families, foster youth alumni and professionals who provided guidance on what content to include, the sites (Florida, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Tribe in North Carolina) who piloted this curriculum and provided candid feedback on how it could be edited, and the multitudes of families and foster youth alumni who participated in the piloting of the curriculum; providing critical feedback on how it could be improved.



This project was funded by the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant #90CO1132. The contents of this material are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau.

CORE TEEN CURRICULUM: RIGHT TIME TRAINING

The CORE Teen Curriculum is comprised of three components: 1) Self-Assessment; 2) Classroom Training, and 3) Right Time Training. It was developed through a 3 year Foster/Adoptive Parent Preparation, Training and Development Initiative cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant #90CO1132. Project partners included Spaulding for Children; the ChildTrauma Academy; The Center for Adoption Support and Education; the North American Council on Adoptable Children; and the University of Washington.

The intent of the project was to develop a state of-the-art training program to equip resource parents to meet the needs of older youth who have moderate to serious emotional and behavior health challenges who require intensive and coordinated services and may be at risk for more restrictive congregative care.



nurture.
inspire.
empower.



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON



ChildTrauma
a c a d e m y



UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR OVERVIEW

“

Kids do well if they can. If they can't, something is getting in the way. We need to figure out what so we can help.

”

~Dr. Stuart Albon

The purpose of this learning opportunity is to further explore how trauma effects youth's behaviors. The experience of trauma often produces behaviors that will seem out of context and usually includes anger, mistrust or defiance. The experience of trauma can also impact school performance and relationships, and can result in delays in and social skills and development. You will explore how the interactions and interventions used with youth who have experienced trauma are different than those used with youth who have not experienced trauma. The learning objectives are to:

- ▶ Understand what traumatic events are and how they affect youth physically, emotionally and psychologically
- ▶ Recognize emotions and behaviors in your child that are associated to a traumatic event
- ▶ Learn how triggers work and how to respond effectively to a traumatic response
- ▶ Gain usable knowledge on how to parent traumatized youth and promote successful behaviors

A youth or adolescent may show signs of a previous trauma in several ways, and the experience of trauma often produces behaviors that will seem out of context and hard to understand. Anger, mistrust, and defiance are common signs of trauma, as well as poor school performance, difficulties with relationships, and delays in development and social skills.

In order to care for a youth with past traumas, you need to know more than just what trauma is and where it comes from, you need to know how to respond to it. As a caregiver, you will likely find that it takes time to identify the signs of trauma and requires sensitivity and creativity to respond to it in a way that will promote healing in the youth.

Trauma informed resource parenting educates parents on how to recognize these events, and more importantly, how to respond. A trauma-informed family is proactive and learns as much about the youth's past as possible. They set realistic expectations and are open to trying new techniques and methods of parenting. Trauma-informed parenting means that you are taking into account the early trauma that the youth has experienced, and you are modifying your parenting to meet the youth's individual needs. It requires that you combine structure with nurturing, create a safe and supportive environment for the youth, and create opportunities for trust-building and connectedness.

It will be important for you to take time to reflect on your own experiences of trauma and consider how these may influence your responses to the youth in your care. Self-care will be important; you may want to refer to the Parental Regulation Right Time Guide to help you develop and practice self-care strategies.

You might also consider reviewing the Right Time Discussion Guide *Trauma Informed Resource Parenting 1: Understanding Our Children's Brains*, where you will learn how trauma affects the youth's physical, psychological and emotional well-being and introduces the critical framework of "Regulate, Relate, Reason" which will help you remember how to best respond to youth who have been effected by all types of trauma.

“

When youth find their way into your home, they want it to stick, but their behavior is going to communicate the exact opposite.

”

~Stuart Ablon

PRE-VIDEO DISCUSSION

Individuals process and show traumas through their behaviors. A youth may show signs of a previous trauma in several ways. A trigger, or internal or external stimulus, will remind the youth of the traumatic event and a traumatic reaction may begin. A traumatic reaction is a re-experience of the event where the same thoughts and emotions are experienced as they were during the traumatic event. This can cause a youth to feel pain, anxiety, or sadness. Since it is difficult to regulate these emotions, the youth will likely feel out of control and may behave in aggressive ways. In the Trauma Informed Parenting 1 segment, you learned that it is difficult for youth to regulate their trauma reactions, and they may be acted out through aggressive behavior or depression. Trauma informed resource parenting guides parents to recognize these events, and to respond in ways that are helpful and promote healing.

- ▶ Can you envision yourself viewing “problematic behaviors” through a different lens?
- ▶ How easy or difficult do you think this will be?

When resource parents promote communication and initiate positive encounters, they can encourage youth to share their thoughts and feelings. Over time, as caregivers take a sincere interest in the experiences of the youth, anxiety can decrease and there can be fewer trauma related behaviors. Youth who have experienced trauma expect rejection and oftentimes feel unimportant. Their previous requests for support may have been ignored. Promoting positive encounters such as hugging, laughing, talking and comforting help create a secure bond, a sense of belonging and safety. Youth who have been traumatized youth may reject encounters at first, but caregivers should remain consistent in their attempts to show their commitment.

- ▶ Can you envision yourself viewing “problematic behaviors” through a different lens?
- ▶ How easy or difficult do you think this will be?

It can be hard to know how to talk to your youth about their past trauma. Asking open-ended questions is one method of communication that is non-threatening and trauma-informed. An example of an open-ended question is: “What did you like about your previous foster home?” When responding to open-ended questions, youth are able to answer based on their own comfort level and may be more likely to respond with more in-depth answers as they feel more comfortable and safe.

- ▶ What types of questions do you typically use to keep a conversation going?
- ▶ What is your comfort level when it comes to hearing someone talk about their painful experiences?

Think of other questions you may have and write them on a piece of paper. Reflect on them while reviewing the video.



VIEW the Understanding Behaviors Right Time Episode

POST VIDEO DISCUSSION

Talk with your viewing partner or support system about your reactions to the video. Was there anything that you heard that surprised you? What questions remain for you?

In the video, Allison Douglas reminded you that youth who are coming to your home because something scary or sad has happened in their family. You heard other parents and experts give examples of the kinds of experiences that youth may have had before coming to your home, such as physical abuse, neglect or sexual abuse. As a result of these experiences, youth develop what are often referred to as “survival behaviors”—and as Dr. Perry explained, most behavior is in reaction to something in the environment (elicited), and is not planned or purposeful.

- ▶ Do you think defiant, aggressive, and other disruptive behavior could be a result of trauma? Why or why not?

You heard Heather Forbes say, “This is a brain issue, not a behavioral issue”. During times when you are experiencing challenging behaviors, it can be hard to remember that the behaviors are often a result of the traumatic events experienced by the youth. It is especially difficult to look beyond the behaviors when they look exactly like disobedience, disrespect, and defiance.

- ▶ Do you believe that all behaviors are intentional?
- ▶ What does it mean that behaviors can be elicited by the environment?
- ▶ Talk with your viewing partner about the difference between these two phrases: Kids do well if they want to. Kids do well if they can.

When talking about the kinds of behaviors that resource parents often see, Dr. Stuart Ablon said, “realizing that *that* behavior flows from the impact of trauma is crucial, because it suggests very different ways of trying to handle it”.

- ▶ Think about some of the traditional parenting techniques that were discussed on the video (time-out, removal of possessions). Why were these identified as ineffective for youth who have been traumatized?
- ▶ If you have used any of these strategies in your own parenting, how might you adapt these techniques?



You heard parents and professionals on the video talk about how youth view situations from a “fear-based” perspective and as a result they can engage in “Fight, Flight or Freeze” behaviors. These are the behaviors that are often seen when the youth is feeling threatened. For many of our children these behaviors were necessary for survival in previous environments. Reflect on some of the Fight, Flight or Freeze behaviors that you heard about in the video.

- ▶ Why is this important to keep in mind when you are thinking about your parenting responses?
- ▶ Talk with your viewing partner about some of the “survival behaviors” you have seen in your youth.

The video segment also reviewed several strategies that can help you communicate with your youth, as shown in the graphic.

- ▶ How prepared do you feel to use these strategies?

TRAUMA INFORMED PARENTING COMPONENTS

You heard many examples in this video segment about what the behaviors related to trauma look like. Discuss some of the examples that you heard with your viewing partner or support system. Review the tips below and consider how these strategies might help you respond differently to the behaviors that you see.

- ▶ **Reframing challenging behaviors as survival skills—** Practicing trauma informed resource parenting is accepting that often a youth's behaviors are rooted in past trauma, therefore what we see and what a youth experiences are two different things. Understanding and accepting that the behaviors that you see are the youth's way of managing their emotions is the first step to reducing the behavior.
- ▶ **Being attuned to the youth and not taking the youth's behavior personally—** Trauma informed resource parenting requires a caregiver's acceptance, resilience and patience. When caregivers are able to contain their own reactions when a youth is responding to a present situation through the lens of a past traumatic event, they are providing youth a safe, stable and supportive environment to process and heal from trauma.
- ▶ **Helping the youth understand the connections between their past experience and current behaviors—** Promoting communication encourages youth to share their thoughts and feelings. Traumatized youth expect rejection and oftentimes feel unimportant. Their previous requests for support may have been ignored. Promoting positive encounters such as hugging, laughing, talking and comforting help create a secure bond, a sense of belonging and safety. Traumatized youth may reject these behaviors due to their previous experiences, but caregivers should remain consistent in their attempts to show their commitment.
- ▶ **Looking beyond the behavior to the underlying cause of the behavior—** Traumatic behaviors can challenge attunement since youth who have experienced trauma may be unable to verbally communicate their needs; they use behaviors instead. Trauma informed resource parents aim to become aware of these behaviors and cues in order to strengthen attunement. As a "feelings detective", caregivers become able to read cues and can respond to the trauma, not the behavior.
- ▶ **Adjusting routines and expectations as needed—** A trauma-informed family is proactive and learns as much about the youth's past as possible. They set realistic expectations and are open to trying new techniques and methods of parenting. Flexibility is key; limit setting with the unique needs of the youth in mind is an important aspect of trauma-informed parenting.

“ Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of trauma. Power and reconnections are the core experiences of recovery.

~Judith Herman

”

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE PARENT RESPONSES BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER BEHAVIORS ARE HAPPENING

You have already identified a number of trauma-informed responses to enhance your parenting strategies. Think about how you will respond in a sequence of before, during and after situations where the youth's behavioral responses are activated.

Before Behaviors Are Happening—REFLECT

- ▶ Prepare for what might happen. Consider how you or the youth have responded to experiences in the past. This will help you to predict how things may go in the future and will minimize the changes that your own stress responses will be activated.
- ▶ Think about how will stay regulated. Remember that you be unable to help your youth if you are overwhelmed and out of control yourself (put your oxygen mask on first and then help others!).

“

Prepare to reflect and reassure.

”

During the Behaviors—REGULATE AND RELATE

- ▶ Resist the temptation to use reasoning or logic. Remember that words make a dysregulated child more dysregulated.
- ▶ Notice your own state of regulation. How are you feeling? What are you thinking? What do you notice about the tone and volume of your voice? What about the stance of your body?
- ▶ Notice the youth's state of regulation. Are you seeing evidence of dysregulation? Pay attention to physical needs. Is the youth tired, hungry, ill, over-heated? Observe the youth's behavioral and physiological responses during interactions to monitor regulation, anxiety and comfort level.

“

The worst time to solve a problem is right when it is happening.

”

- ▶ Use co-regulation to help your youth feel less threatened. Can you divert the youth to a more sensory and rhythmic activity such as walking, running, drumming, or singing a song? Doing something patterned and repetitive will eventually help your youth hear you as you start talking with them from a more logical point of view. Try saying something simple such as, “Let's take a walk.”

- ▶ Pause for a moment and observe to gain perspective. What are the youth's unique needs and past responses in similar situations? Consider the youth's emotional and social age. Are your expectations developmentally appropriate, or are you relying only on the youth's age in years?

- ▶ Pay attention to relationship needs. How can you use this time to relate to your youth? Are you emotionally availability (present)? Can you give the youth your full and complete attention? Are you listening attentively without interrupting or commenting?

After the Behaviors—REASON

- ▶ This is the time to “think it through with the youth”. You might not like the behavior, but it is important that you remember that there are good reasons for it. Make a neutral observation about the situation, not the behavior. Your discussions are about perspectives and skill building. Talk less, listen more.
- ▶ Stay positive and continue to relate by committing to regulating your own emotions and resisting the impulse to be punitive. Check your voice quality (tone, volume, cadence) to maintain a non-threatening interaction with your youth.
- ▶ Find something to praise; praise is a way to help your youth learn which kinds of behaviors are acceptable, even from the earliest days. Youth should be praised primarily for their efforts, rather than for their personal characteristics. Acknowledge the youth’s efforts and give positive feedback.
- ▶ Discuss each other’s perspective and work towards resolution together. Your interaction can be face-to-face with your youth, but you may find it easier to be in conversation in parallel, without eye contact for example.
- ▶ Do not lecture your youth during discussions. Try to use short phrases that are focused on problem solving and skill development.
- ▶ Build in “do overs”. Your youth will need practice as they try to use new patterns of communication.

“

Choose a time and place when you are both calm and accessible.

”

BUT WHAT ABOUT THERAPY??!!?

Youth who have spent significant time in care have also likely spent a great deal of time in therapy. In some cases, even after spending years in therapy, a young person may still be struggling with and impacted greatly by their past traumatic experiences. One reason for this is that some therapies are ineffective in addressing the problems that trauma creates. For example, treatment modalities that are primarily behaviorally based are not generally effective in helping to heal trauma. There are many therapeutic approaches that work well for youth who have experienced trauma. While this should not be considered a comprehensive list, here are a few modalities that your youth's therapist or other professionals may consider as part of your youth's care. Review these summaries and visit the associated web-sites to learn more about these approaches. Consider asking your youth's therapist or other professionals involved in your youth's care about whether any of these or other approaches might be a good fit.

- ▶ Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC)—A flexible, components-based intervention developed for children and adolescents who have experienced complex trauma, along with their caregiving systems. ARC identifies important childhood skills and competencies which are routinely shown to be negatively affected by traumatic stress and by attachment disruptions, and which – when addressed – predict resilient outcome. For more information: <https://arcframework.org/what-is-arc/>
- ▶ Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)—A psychotherapy treatment that was originally designed to alleviate the distress associated with traumatic memories (Shapiro, 1989a, 1989b). During EMDR therapy the client attends to emotionally disturbing material in brief sequential doses while simultaneously focusing on an external stimulus. For more information: <http://www.emdr.com>
- ▶ Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT)—A developmentally-informed, biologically-respectful approach to working with at-risk children. The Neurosequential Model is a way to organize a child's history and current functioning. The goal of this approach is to help guide the application of interventions in a way that will help family, educators, therapists and related professionals best meet the needs of the child. For more information: <http://childtrauma.org/nmt-model/>
- ▶ Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)—A conjoint child and parent psychotherapy approach that incorporates trauma-sensitive interventions with cognitive behavioral, family, and humanistic principles and techniques. Children and parents learn new skills to help process thoughts and feelings related to traumatic life events; manage and resolve distressing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to traumatic life events; and enhance safety, growth, parenting skills, and family communication. For more information: <https://tfcbt.org>
- ▶ Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI)—An attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. TBRI® uses Empowering Principles to address physical needs, Connecting Principles for attachment needs, and Correcting Principles to disarm fear-based behaviors. While the intervention is based on years of attachment, sensory processing, and neuroscience research, the heartbeat of TBRI® is connection. For more information: <https://child.tcu.edu/about-us/tbri/#sthash.ey0nPv2J.dpbs>

RESOURCES

These resources provide additional information you may want to consider.

► **Parenting After Trauma: Understanding Your Child's Needs: A Guide for Foster and Adoptive Parents**

A 2016 publication of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption that provides an easy to read yet comprehensive summary of how trauma impacts the brain, what the resulting behaviors look like, and provides concrete tips for parenting children who have experienced trauma.

<https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-foster-care-america/Documents/FamilyHandout.pdf>

► **The Repair of Early Trauma – A Bottom Up Approach**

This 10-minute video, produced by Beacon House (a mental health and occupational therapy program in the UK) helps to lay the foundation for why a therapeutic parenting approach is most helpful with our youth who have experienced trauma.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOCTxcaNHeq>

► **Six Core Strengths for Healthy Child Development: An Overview**

This 5-minute video provides an overview of the Six Core Strengths for Healthy Child Development, which came from the work of the ChildTrauma Academy in the area of violence in childhood. An accompanying handout on this topic is available here: <http://www.1awesomedad.com/files/six-core-strengths-healthy-child-development.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skaYWKC6iD4>

► **The 2018 Prevention Resource Guide: Keeping Children Safe and Families Strong in Supportive Communities**

The 2018 Prevention Resource Guide, produced by the Children's Bureau, was designed to support service providers as they work with families to promote child well-being and prevent child maltreatment. It focuses on protective factors that build on family strengths to foster healthy child and youth development. Review these three tips sheets from the guide:

- [Helping Your Child Heal from Trauma](#)
- [Managing Stress](#)
- [Connecting With Your Teen](#)

A link to the full publication can be found here:

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/resource-guide/>

CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

Traumatic behaviors can challenge attunement since youth who have experienced traumatized may be unable to verbally communicate their needs; they use behaviors instead. Trauma informed resource parents aim to become aware of these behaviors and cues in order to strengthen attunement. As a “feelings detective”, caregivers become able to read cues and can respond to the trauma, not the behavior.

Now, it is time to develop a plan to address those areas you would like to change. Consider the points / questions below, as well as your action plan from the Trauma Informed Parenting 1, self-assessment and classroom material.

- If you completed the CORE Teen Self-Assessments, consider your results related to the characteristics that are essential to support trauma informed parenting (self-awareness, self-regulation, acceptance, adaptability/flexibility, attunement, compassion, hopefulness, and patience/perseverance).
 - You may also want the review the material that was presented in classroom Sessions 1 & 2.
- ❖ Consider what “events” occurred in your life? How did this experience impact your parenting?
- What are your triggers that result from the events in your life?
 - How does this relate to your level of comfort, confidence and ability to parent the youth?
- ❖ Reflect on your thoughts about adapting your parenting approach.
- What strengths will you leverage, and what additional help will you need?
 - What will you, as the caregiver have to change?
 - What barriers may impact your ability to sustain parenting approaches that are trauma informed?
- ❖ What behaviors or responses from the youth do you anticipate?
- What “events” occurred in the life of your youth?
 - What are the youth’s triggers?

Understanding Youth's Behaviors

Traumatic behaviors can challenge attunement since youth who have experienced traumatized may be unable to verbally communicate their needs; they use behaviors instead. Trauma informed resource parents aim to become aware of these behaviors and cues in order to strengthen attunement. As a “feelings detective”, caregivers become able to read cues and can respond to the trauma, not the behavior.

Use the chart below to identify behaviors your youth has exhibited in the past. Write a trauma-informed response to that behavior. If they have not displayed that behavior in the past, think about what you might do to plan for it. Add this chart to your Family Action Plan.

Survival Behavior	Underlying Emotional Issue	Response
Aggressiveness	Fear of becoming attached. <i>“I’ll hurt you before you hurt me.”</i>	
Foul Language	Fear of appearing weak (and therefore a target). May have heard foul language being used and believe it is a good way to appear strong and get attention.	
Testing and Control Battles	If living in an unpredictable environment, youth may not have had consistent behavior modeled to them. In an attempt to seek control and stability they attempt to control you and everyone else.	
Running Away	Fear of abuse or becoming attached to someone other than their birth family, fear of being vulnerable. It may be easier to avoid stressful situations than work through them. Some youth also want to return to their birth home. Running away is also an attention-seeking behavior.	
Self-injurious Behavior	Low self-esteem, lack of coping skills, depression, or suicidal feelings. This behavior gives a sense of control. “I can control when I get hurt.”	
Drug and/or Alcohol Use	An attempt to numb painful memories and thoughts. May be viewed as a way to escape problems.	
Lying and Stealing	Conflict in values. What was learned through birth family and the system are that youth have to take what they need to take care of themselves.	
Withdrawal from Relationships	Fear of becoming attached or hurt: “I won’t relate to you, and that way I won’t have to care about you.”	
Hoarding	Fear of being out of control. Fear of not having enough food or other necessities.	

Trouble Sleeping at Night	Fear of being in a new place, memories/nightmare of being abused. This could be linked to depressive disorders or trauma reaction.	
Difficulty at School	May indicate learning impairments or he or she might be acting out behaviorally as a way to distract parent and teachers from poor academic performance.	
Impulsivity	A feature of trauma reaction. The youth has learned that things are always unpredictable and may not have learned restraint or respect for boundaries.	